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Hyperbole and Understatement in the Depiction of the Emotions

Oft with true sighs, oft with uncalled tears,
Now with slow words, now with dumb eloquence [. . .]
(Philip Sydney: *Astrophel and Stella* [1591] etext)

The language of the emotions seems to be infinitely varied. Their expression can run the whole gamut from elaborate eloquence to reservedness and understatement, from verbosity to suggestive body language. In every culture, however, the expression of the emotions is also subject to particular display rules which regulate what and how much a speaker may appropriately express under what circumstances. In my paper, I want to analyse the display rules in operation in English literature with regard to the description of pain and desire which, at first sight, are not only situated at opposed poles of human experience, but also seem to be regulated by entirely different rules of decorum. The article will illustrate that despite the remarkable consistency of pain and love metaphors used in a wide range of poetry and prose, acceptability of emotional rhetoric and the use of stylistic excess or understatement in a text is still strongly dependent on genre, gender, culture and context. Examples will be drawn from a wide range of texts in poetry and prose; for reasons of scope, drama will not be considered.

Psychologists, physicians and literary scholars have all emphasised the difficulty of expressing physical pain in words. Extreme pain, "actively destroys" (Scarry 1985: 4) language, completely resists narrative embodiment (Wandless 1991: 52) and reduces the sufferer to cries and groans (which, indeed, are the natural language of pain, just as they are, in fact, the language of sexual pleasure). Even in such cases, however, the body is not mute but inarticulate, speaking in pains and symptoms (Frank 1995: 2). Yet even under less traumatic circumstances the number of lexicalised pain words in the English language is fairly limited. Many pain words in English (as the carefully researched Mc Gill pain questionaire shows) are metaphorical and refer to temporal, thermal and pressure dimensions of pain, to its intensity and fluctuation, and to the sensory, affective and evaluative content of the experience (Melzack and Katz

1992: 153). Thus pain may, for instance, be described as pricking, boring, drilling, stabbing or lancinating (on a rising scale regarding the intensity of the sensation), or be graded as hot, burning, scalding and searing. Depending on its intensity, pain can feel dull, sore, hurting, aching or heavy; depending on duration it can be transient, intermittent, rhythmic or constant. From an evaluative angle it can, for instance, be described as annoying, troublesome, miserable, intense or unbearable. Many of these expressions take the form of metaphors trying to find equivalents to the elusive nature of pain, so difficult to communicate to interlocutors, in common experiences within our culture, such as pricking or burning: "When fevers burn, or agues freezes" (Burns, "To the Toothache," see below) or "a sharp piercing pain like a red-hot needle" (Lodge 1995: 3, 4). However, as I have pointed out elsewhere (Rubik 2008: 258), comparisons with stabbing, for instance, invoke what speakers imagine violent penetration would feel like, rather than reflecting real-life experience. We thus learn rhetorical idioms to verbalise bodily dysfunction (Kleinman 1988: 13), but genuine communication about the subjective experience of the affliction itself remains precariously imprecise.

Intuitively, we would think that the range of words available to us for the expression of love is infinitely more varied. Virginia Woolf herself stated that "[t]he merest schoolgirl when she falls in love has Shakespeare, Donne, Keats to speak her mind for her," whereas there are no literary precedents for the expression of pain (Woolf 1994: 318f). Cognitive linguists like Kövecses (2000), however, have pointed out that when we speak of love in the English language, we usually also draw upon a fairly limited range of some 10 conceptual metaphors. Love – or lust – is conceptualised as FIRE; HUNGER; ANIMAL; WAR; DISEASE AND INSANITY; NATURAL FORCE; RAPTURE; OPPONENT, and PRESSURE IN A CONTAINER.

Here are some typical examples: In Manley's *New Atalantis* (1991: 19, 41, 33), the amorous Duchess is overcome with "transport" at her (false) lover's vows; Charlot is a "lovesick maid," and the Duke is "regularly possessed. [...] That fatal night the Duke felt hostile fires in his breast. Love was entered with all his dreadful artillery: he took possession in a moment of the avenues that lead to the heart." Manley's description thus blends images from the conceptual metaphors of RAPTURE, INSANITY; FIRE and WAR/OPPONENT. Jane Eyre is quite overcome by an unexpected encounter with Rochester: "[...] every nerve I have is unstrung: for a moment I am beyond my own mastery," and a confession of love is wrung from her: "I said this almost involuntarily, and, with as little sanction of free will, my tears gushed out," since "I could

repress what I endured no longer" (Brontë 1966: 272, 279, 280). Here, the imagery seems to be taken from PRESSURE IN A CONTAINER and NATURAL FORCE. Later, after the interrupted wedding, her resistance drives Rochester half mad: "Jane, you must be reasonable, or in truth I shall again become frantic," and "[h]e seemed to devour me with his flaming glance: physically, I felt, at the moment, powerless as stubble exposed to the draught and glow of a furnace" (Brontë 1966: 331, 344). In this passage the metaphors of FIRE , MADNESS, HUNGER, ANIMAL and NATURAL FORCE are linked. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the male character employs the image of HUNGER/THIRST when he feels that Bertha "had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it" (Rhys 1968: 141). Lovelace, in *Clarissa*, is riven by the ANIMAL force of his passion: "[. . .] the rage of love, the rage of revenge is upon me! By turns they tear me!" (Richardson 1962: 194)

Complete reconceptualisations of love in terms of different metaphors are rare, though poetic elaboration is more frequent, in which ideas taken from the 10 basic conceptual metaphors are developed further: thus Lawrence (1987: 313f.) speaks of a

> dark flood of electric passion she released from him [. . .] She had established a rich new circuit, a new current of passional electric energy, between the two of them, released from the darkest poles of the body and established in perfect circuit. It was a dark fire of electricity that rushed from him to her, and flooded them both with rich peace, satisfaction.

Lawrence thereby modifies and expands the original concepts of LOVE IS FIRE and LOVE IS A NATURAL FORCE. In *New Atalantis* Manley, elaborating the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS DISEASE, compares guilty passion to an "irremediable poison" (1991: 32) infecting the body and weakening the moral stamina. Restoration comedy is particularly inventive in its (often misogynist) imagery, yet even comparisons of would-be lovers to "Huntsmen," who "lose more time [. . .] in starting the game, than in running it down" (Wycherley 2000: 175) in fact draw upon an ANIMAL concept, and the analogy of sexual abstinence and fasting obviously utilises the HUNGER metaphor: "Faith, long fasting, child, spoils a man's appetite." [. . .] "And would you fall to, before a priest says grace?" (Behn 1992: 192f.). Even such far-fetched images as likening love relations to a card game: "a man can never quietly give over when he's weary" (Etherege 2000: 308), or business relations: "of all old Debts Love [. . .] is paid the most unwillingly," (Wycherley 2000: 175) can ultimately be traced back to the concept of an OPPONENT to be cheated. That does not mean

that complete innovation is entirely impossible. "Mistresses are like Books; if you pore upon them too much, they doze you [. . .]" (Wycherley 2000: 176) is certainly an unusual simile, though, after all, it likens the ennui of sated passion with a NATURAL FORCE of drowsiness impossible to resist.

In both the descriptions of love and pain, however, the difficulty not only consists in finding the adequate word to convey an individual experience, but also of striking a balance between tact and immediacy. Descriptions of the emotions are thus not merely a matter of the lexicon, but also of taboo and decorum. There are rules of display which differ from culture to culture and are also contingent on class, gender and age as well as on genre. Especially experts working with pain patients have recently become increasingly aware of the problems such cultural codes present for the diagnosis and treatment of illnesses especially in multi-cultural societies. Although the acuity of the senses responsible for registering pain sensations is the same in all normal people (Wall 1999: 63), tolerance levels and rules of display vary culturally and according to context (even depending, in experiments, as Wall (1999: 67) has pointed out, on "whether the person applying the stimulus is male or female, a professor, a technician or a fellow student."). Conversely, sympathetic response by the environment to the patients' suffering also significantly hinges on social and gendered expectations:

> In a large hospital, female nurses shared the responsibilites for postoperative patients in both male and female wards. It was found that the consumption of analgesics was much higher in the male wards than in the female wards. The nurses were carefully observed and interviewed. Their consistant attitude was that if a male patient complained of pain it must be serious because everyone knew that male patients were a tough lot and should be taken seriously. On the other hand, they had a different attitude to their fellow females, who were generally considered by these nurses to make a great fuss about minor problems and therefore were to be brushed off with a minimal response. (Wall 1999: 69)

Such surveys show that hospital staff tend not to take seriously patients' complaints if in their own estimation (based on stereotype) the pain display is "inappropriate" to a given situation. In multi-cultural societies, patients may well be admonished to "control themselves" if they fail to conform to what is considered generally acceptable display in the host culture, though entirely different rules may apply in the patient's own cultural background. Indeed, even the very notion of what is an illness differs between cultures, as it did from one historical period to another (Kleinman 1988: 11). Interpreters may well

be needed in hospitals as cultural mediators to explain culturally contingent forms of pain behaviour.

Since display rules of what may legitimately be expressed by whom, to what extent and under what circumstances are internalised from a very early age on, writers can generally predict quite accurately the expectations of readers from the same cultural background and hence "what it standardly takes" (Carroll 1997: 205, 206) to elicit sympathy or antipathy for a particular fictional character who is in love or pain. Many critics have argued that focalization is the decisive point in evoking reader empathy. But in fact the situation is much more complicated. Focalization no more automatically evokes sympathy than any other stylistic device. Reader emotions are manipulated by a complicated and delicate interplay of various stylistic features in which choice of words, but also the length of the description and detail dwelt upon play a decisive role as well. Robert Burns' humorous poem "Address to the Toothache. Written when the Author was grievously tormented by that disorder" is an excellent example.

> My curse upon your venom'd stang,
> That shoots my tortur'd gums alang,
> An' thro' my lug gies mony a twang,
> Wi' gnawing vengeance,
> Tearing my nerves wi' bitter pang,
> Like racking engines!
> [. . .]
> Adown my beard the slavers trickle
> I throw the wee stools o'er the mickle,
> While round the fire the giglets keckle,
> To see me loup,
> While, raving mad, I wish a heckle
> Were in their doup!
> [. . .]
> Where'er that place be priests ca' hell,
> Where a' the tones o' misery yell,
> [. . .]
> Thou, Toothache, surely bear'st the bell,
> Amang them a'!
> [. . .] (Burns [1786]: etext)

The vivid description of the toothache is doubtless convincing. Burns employs an impressive number of lexicalized pain words to describe the qualia of his affliction. Evaluative adjectives give an insight into the subjective experience

of the pain, which is also inscribed on his body. Body language and somatic symptoms act as metonymic indicators of pain both in real life and in literature. Yet spending so much time on complaining and detailing the agony caused by what is, after all, a minor illness, creates the impression of snivelling. It is exactly here that rules of pain behaviour mentally klick into operation: the sufferer's frantic demeanour will, in an English context, be considered as inappropriate behaviour for a man, as will the linguistic hyperbole – he likens toothache to the worst torture in hell. In addition, the broad Scottish dialect and the ingenuity of finding so many rhyming pain words for the aaabab rhyme scheme, add to the humorous tone. All in all, the speaker is thereby turned into an object of ridicule rather than empathy.

Surprisingly, hyperbole seems acceptable in Winscom's "The Head-Ach," possibly because the speaker is a woman, for whom different display rules apply. She, too, somewhat exaggeratedly speaks of her headache as "agonizing," "torture," "worse than death"; but she suppresses her pain display for the sake of decorum: hers is a "silent anguish," an "unutterable sigh." The poem adopts a confessional tone and casts the reader as confidante and possible counsellor (rather than as an amused spectator, as in Burns' poem).

[. . .] In each successive month full twelve long days
And tedious nights my sun withdraws his rays!
Leaves me in silent anguish on my bed,
Afflicting all the members in the head;
Throug [sic!] ev'ry particle the torture flies,
But centers in the temples, brain and eyes;
The efforts of the hands and feet are vain,
While bows the head with agonizing pain;
While heaves the breast th'unutterable sigh,
And the big tear drops from the languid eye.
For ah! my children want a mother's care,
A husband, too, should due assistance share,
Myself for action form'd would fain thro' life
Be found th'assidous – valuable wife;
But now, behold, I live unfit for ought;
[. . .]
Ye sage Physicians, where's your wonted skill?
In vain the blisters, bolusses and pill;
[. . .]
In vain the British and Cephalic Snuff,
All Patent Medicines are empty stuff;

> The launcet [sic!], leech, and cupping swell the train
> Of useless efforts, which but gave me pain;
> [. . .]. (Winscom 1774: 152–155)

Physicians (Wall (1999), Frank (1995), Kleinman (1988)) have recently stressed the influence the patient's attitude to the illness has on the perception of pain. Interpretations may range from suffering as the wages of sin to meaningless existential torture, and subjective experience of pain will vary accordingly. In Winscom's case, the lyrical speaker's suffering is obviously aggravated by her feeling of guilt towards her husband and children for neglecting her duties, and by the discrepancy between her sickly state and her own active self image (she is unable to render "due assistance" and "care," indeed "unfit for ought"). The location of her pain in "the temples, brain and eyes," its regular recurrence and the sensitivity to light (in a line not quoted above the illness threatens to "dissolve my sight") allow us to surmise that Winscom probably suffered from severe migraine. The list of useless remedies she tried –though some may seem odd to a modern reader – does not give the impression of excessive self-pity but rather serves as proof of the severity of the illness and her desperate search for relief, thereby inviting a sympathetic reaction on the part of the reader.

Whether or not readers are willing to accept a lengthy dwelling on pain, of course, also very much depends on the seriousness of the case. The description of her own mastectomy, which Fanny Burney gives in a letter to Esther Burney, though long and horribly detailed, never seems exaggerated or self-pitying. Quite on the contrary; considering that the operation was performed without anaesthetic, one wonders how a patient could remember so clearly and describe with such precision. There is no need to dwell extensively on the qualia of the sensations; the physical symptoms – her screaming, fainting, blanched face, metonymically indicate the excrutiating pain, and the mere description of the incision and scraping will send a sympathetic shudder down the spine of every reader.

> Yet when the dreadful steel plunged into the breast – cutting through veins – arteries – flesh – nerves [. . .] I began a scream that lasted unintermittingly during the whole time of the incision – I marvel that it rings not in my Ears still! so excrutiating was the agony. When the wound was made, & the instrument was withdrawn, the pain seemed undiminished, for the air that suddenly rushed into those delicate parts felt like a mass of minute but sharp & forked poniards that were tearing the edges of the wound [. . .] presently the terrible cutting was renewed & worse than ever, to separate the bottom, the foundation of this dreadful gland from the parts to which it

> adhered [. . .]. Oh Heavens! I then felt the Knife <rack>ling against the breast bone – scraping it! (Burney 1985: 612)

Burney uses plenty of evaluative and affective pain words, yet she comes across as remarkably brave and self-disciplined, considering the acuteness of pain we are invited to imagine. Indeed, the passage seems anything but hyperbolic. It is, however, essential that this description occurs in a private letter and thus has the status of a confidential unburdening to a relative, and was not meant for publication and thus subject to different rules of decorum and taboo.

In contrast, when the unlikeable main character in Atwood's novel *Bodily Harm* doubles over, collapses, writhes on the floor and thinks she will die because she has contracted diarrhoea in prison – while other inmates are tortured to death – the description of her agonized personal experience renders her contemptible rather than pitiable.

> Rennie doubles over [. . .] she can feel the sweat dripping down her back, she's dizzy, she hates pain. She's been invaded, usurped, germs taking over, betrayal of the body.
> [. . .] her head is the size of a watermelon, soft and pink, it's swelling up, she's going to burst open, she's going to die [. . .].
> "You okay?" says Lorna. [. . .] "It's only turistas. Montezuma's Revenge, the tourists call it. Everyone gets it sooner or later. Take it from me, you'll live."
> (Atwood 1982: 86)

Hypochondria and exaggerated moaning and groaning are generally considered as contemptible and/or ridiculous in English and, indeed, European culture (viz. the figure of the malade imaginaire), unless the patient is a child, as in Hemingway's story "A Day's Wait," whom the reader regards with a mixture of pity and amusement.

How strongly pain descriptions are dependent not only on cultural taboos but also on genre conventions is evinced by Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, which reports in gruesome detail how the hero was tortured and slowly dismembered, but conceals the operation of pain on the body and leaves out all somatic details metonymically suggesting his agony.

> [. . .] but they [. . .] whipped them in a most deplorable and inhumane manner, rending the very flesh from their bones; [. . .] and then rubbed his wounds, to complete their cruelty, with Indian pepper [. . .] the exuctioner came, and first cut off his members, and threw them into the fire. After that, with an ill-favoured knife, they cut his ears, and his nose, and burned them; he still smoked on, as if nothing had touched him. Then they hacked off one of his arms, and still he bore up, and held

> his pipe. But at the cutting off the other arm, his head sunk, and his pipe dropped, and he gave up the ghost, without a groan, or a reproach. (Behn 1992: 140)

Oroonoko, who is modelled on the heroes of heroic tragedy, shows no outward signs of pain or emotional disturbance even when his wounds are rubbed with red pepper and he is torn limb by limb – descriptions which make the reader wince and give us "an opportunity to feel torture vicariously" (Campbell 1999: 275). In contrast to his supernational courage and stamina in facing physical pain, however, the hero showed plenty of distress in an earlier scene when he mourned the beloved wife he had just killed to save her from rape and enslavement (cf. Morris 1991: 58–60). His emotional agony indeed leaves him quite emasculated.

> But when he found she was dead [. . .] his grief swelled up to rage; he tore, he raved, he roared, like some monster of the wood [. . .]. A thousand times he turned the fatal knife that did the deed, towards his own heart [. . .] grief would get the ascendant of rage, and he would lie down by her side, and water her face with showers of tears [. . .]. (Behn 1992: 131 f.)

Display rules obviously decreed that a hero was allowed to verbalize emotional suffering at great length but could not give in to physical pain without loss of face.

Indeed, Elizabethan or seventeenth century prose texts do not spell out a victim's experience of and response to physical pain, though they may describe torture at length. As, for instance, in *The Unfortunate Traveller*, which employs horribly suggestive pain words and details the wounds produced on various parts of the body by diverse torture instruments. Nashe's readers, of course, were used to public executions and may have accepted forms of punishment that seem sickening to a modern sensibility, if the torture was inflicted on figures which were portrayed as inveterate villains (such as the Jew or Cutwolf). The reader's sympathy for their suffering is also curbed by the absurd similes Nashe employs: "His nailes they . . . under-propt . . . with sharpe prickes, like a Tailors shop window halfe open on a holy daie" (Nashe 1966: 316).

When it comes to descriptions of love, overstatement, one would think, is much more acceptable, indeed expected. Especially Elizabethan poetry is full of exstatic praises of a beloved or descriptions of love-sickness (as in Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* quoted as an epigraph), and who will not think of *Romeo and Juliet* when it comes to the portrayal of romantic love. Rhapsodic rhetoric of love, interestingly, is equally acceptable in women's poetry: Aphra Behn

gained a reputation for love poetry which inverts the traditional gender roles. In contrast, a marked absence of enthusiastic rhetoric, as in Cummings' poem "may I feel said he," which completely eschews expressions of rapture and insight into the lovers' minds, is likely to produce the impression of a merely casual love affair and emotional shallowness.

> "may I feel said he
> (i'll squeal said she/just once said he)
> it's fun said she/[...]
> (tiptop said he
> don't stop said she/ oh no said he)
> go slow said she [...]" (Cummings 1987: 1686)

How difficult and problematic it is to generalise on such issues, however, is proved by the fact that Lovelace's hyperbolic assertions of love for Clarissa, in the context of the novel, give the impression of self-stylization and performance rather than genuine emotion. The acceptability of hyperbole in love descriptions, indeed, is mainly true for poetry. In narrative, as opposed to poetry, different display rules seem to apply. The caution, "The lady does protest too much, methinks," apart from formulating a gendered display rule as regards romantic love vows, also applies to prose in general: a character who utters extravagant vows and declarations often stands in danger of losing credibility: being too elaborate, too artful and too insistent is regarded as suspicious. It is symptomatic that Virginia Woolf, when she enumerated the schoolgirls' models for romantic love rhetoric I quoted above, should have thought exclusively of poets: Shakespeare, Donne and Keats, each famous for rhapsodic love lyrics.

In general, love descriptions in prose tend to be much more restrained. Jane Austen, of course, is famous as an extreme case of reticence, avoiding any lengthy love scenes and famously cutting short reader expectations by refusing to put on paper what Emma said to Mr Knightley: "She spoke then, on being so entreated. – What did she say? – Just what she ought, of course. A lady always does" (Austen 1996: 354). Such stylistic restraint cannot merely be put down to nineteenth century female decorum. Almost 200 years later, when Winterson in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is hardly less reticent. When the lesbian heroine falls in love with another woman,

> [t]here was something crawling in my belly. I had an octopus inside me. And it was evening and it was morning; another day. After that, we did everything together, and I stayed with her as often as I could. [...] "Do you think this is Unnatural

> Passion?" I asked her once. "Doesn't feel like it. According to Pastor Finch, that's awful." She must be right, I thought. (Winterson 2001: 86)

Body language, of course, is often made to stand in for verbal declarations: if a character exhibits somatic symptoms such as an increased heart rate, blushing, dizziness, physical weakness, inability to think, and the like (Kövecses 2000: 123f.), he or she is assumed to be in love. Jane Eyre is a case in point: her love is written on her body, though she is also explicit enough about her emotions (one of the many generic signs of romance in the novel).

> I was experiencing an ordeal: a hand of fiery iron grasped my vitals. Terrible moment: full of struggle, blackness, burning! Not a human being that ever lived could wish to be loved better than I was loved; and him who thus loved me I absolutely worshipped: and I must renounce love and idol. (Brontë 1966: 342)

On the whole, however, hyperbolic love rhetoric in prose can easily give the impression of sentimentality and is, indeed, the staple diet in the love stories of Robinson, Pilcher, Deveraux and the ilk, where authors dwell extensively on the overwrought feelings of their protagonists.

> "Look, you and I both know that we're attracted to each other. From the moment I first saw you my palms have been sweating." [. . .] Jace started to say something, but instead he pulled her into his arms and kissed her with the passion he'd been feeling since he met her. His hands ran over her back, up her neck, through her hair, then back down again, while his mouth overtook hers, his tongue touching hers, invading her mouth. (Deveraux 2007: 192 f.)

Alternatively, lengthy and ecstatic descriptions of love scenes are, of course, also found in erotic or pornographic literature. Texts like *Fanny Hill* brim with florid descriptions of lascivious touches, fires of passion pulsing through veins and similarly prurient passages.

Of course, in fiction the range of individual styles is enormous. Both Lawrence and Hardy, for instance, are canonical writers who do not shy away from lengthy descriptions of love and desire. The ecstatic description of Angel's love for Tess (focalized through the young man's point of view) indeed has a strong resemblance to poetry.

> How very lovable her face was to him. [. . .] her mouth he had seen nothing to equal on the face of the earth. To a young man with the least fire in him that little upward lift in the middle of her red top lip was distracting, infatuating, maddening. He had never before seen a woman's lips and teeth which forced upon his mind with such

> persistent iteration the old Elizabethan simile of roses filled with snow.
> (Hardy 1974: 190)

Although Lawrence is famous for the convincing metaphors he finds for physical attraction, even in his fiction lengthy descriptions of desire often focus on obsession rather than love – as in "The Prussian Officer," or in "The Fox." The latter story extensively describes the madness of frustrated love, while the love scenes between the boy and March are comparatively short.

> He set his teeth, and for a moment went almost pale, yellow round the eyes with fury. He said nothing and saw nothing and felt nothing but a livid rage that was quite unreasoning. Balked! Balked again! Balked! He wanted the woman, he had fixed like doom upon having her. He felt that was his doom, his destiny, and his reward, to have this woman. She was his heaven and hell on earth, and he would have none elsewhere. (Lawrence 1960: 144)

Indeed, overstatement often spells out madness or infatuation rather than genuine love – as in the long and obsessive description the male narrator gives of the mysterious She in Rider-Haggard's novel. As soon as she has unveiled her face, the narrator falls under her spell, "eat[ing] out [his] heart in impotent desires" (Rider-Haggard 2001: 158). Her beauty blinds him, her silvery voice charms him, her perfume dazzles him.

> I could bear it no longer. I am but a man, and she was more than a woman. [...] then and there I fell upon my knees before her, and told her in a sad mixture of languages [...] that I worshipped her as never woman was worhsipped, and that I would give my immortal soul to marry her [...]. (Rider-Haggard 2001: 193)

What is described here, however, is not a genuine love scene, but, in fact, a confrontation with the abject, with a sexuality and a female power outside the social law, which is threatening madness and death to the man, not fulfilment. Similarly, the elaborate descriptions in Manley's *New Atalantis* depict obsessive erotic appetite and corrupt excess. The indulgence in sensuous detail and sophisticated elaboration mirror the characters' lack of moral restraint.

This paper has shown that images describing physical pain and love or lust tend to draw on a fairly limited fund of conceptual metaphors, though they can be linked in a variety of innovative combinations. It has also become obvious that the display rules for love and pain are not so antithetical in English culture as one might suppose. It is indisputable that rules of decorum in the descriptions of these emotions have a decisive influence on the reaction of readers to literary

texts. However, given the infinite variety of literary styles, it is, of course, difficult to formulate any rules. Whereas readers seem to expect hyperbole in poetry, it may (but need not!) give an impression of sentimental excess, insincerity or prurience in prose. Reticence may function as anti-climax, especially in poetry, whereas in prose both hyperbole and understatement may be equally effective. It is essential to remember, however, that response to emotional rhetoric in a particular text certainly depends not only on a successful conceptual blend to express the respective feeling and on the stylistic excess or restraint of its expression but on an almost infinite variety of interconnected effects relating to genre and point of view, but also to the gender and age of a speaker, and to the text's addressee and context. Descriptions employing very similar images or stylistic features may hence still challenge entirely different responses because of a reader's sense of what is appropriate for a man or a woman, a hero or a villain, for public display or private confession, for omniscient or focalised narration, for poetry or prose, in the past or in the present.

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